

Mr. Speaker, it's time for a minimum wage increase, it's time to help family businesses.

We are playing out the next round of inappropriate tax cuts, this time under the guise of helping minimum wage workers. A discussion on the minimum wage and small business taxes is appropriate. We must increase the minimum wage so that it at least keeps up with inflation. We can provide tax assistance to those who need it. But the two efforts should not be linked. This is a political exercise that guarantees that nothing will pass. It invites a veto.

A two-year minimum wage bill would pass and swiftly become law. Oregon's experience has shown that you can have healthy economic growth and a higher minimum wage. As Oregon's wage rate was phased in from 1997 to 1999, 57,000 welfare recipients found jobs, a 33% reduction in the total welfare caseload. Total unemployment in our state has dropped from 6% to 4.7% since Oregon's wage rate increased to \$6.50 an hour over a year ago, to become the highest minimum wage in the nation.

I am eager to work for tax reform for those who need it most: closely-held businesses, farms and woodlots. The Democratic alternative would increase the current \$1.3 million estate tax exclusion to a \$4 million per family exclusion. We could pass this kind of targeted tax bill tomorrow, but we can and should do more. The current estate tax often forces sale of assets, cutting of timber or even sale of the business itself to pay the tax. We should permanently exempt closely-held family businesses and farms from estate taxes so long as the assets stay within the family or the same closely-held ownership.

The Republican tax bill does not target those who need the most help. Only 1/6 of the benefits go to 'small business.' The majority of taxpayers would only see about a \$4 tax cut. Worse, the Republican tax bill commits over a hundred billion dollars in tax breaks without a budget and without guaranteed protections for Medicare and Social Security. This is a dangerous game.

I urge the Republican leadership to stop playing politics. Don't force a bill that doesn't stand a chance of being enacted into law. Give Congress the chance to vote a fair minimum wage increase up or down. Allow a proposal to help family businesses and farms to stay in the family. These are two proposals the American people support and deserve.